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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00
	CTME-00	INL-00	USNW-00	DOEE-00	ITCE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	EB-00	EXME-00	OIGO-00	E-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	FRB-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	ITC-01	L-00
	VCE-00	MOFM-05	MOF-03	AC-01	NEA-00	DCP-01	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OES-01	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PC-01	PM-00
	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00	STR-00
	TEST-00	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	SA-00	FMP-00	EPAE-00
	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00
	SWCI-00	/019W					

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4519
INFO AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
SECDEF WASHDC//ISA/ABLAGG//
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI//FPA//

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; NEA/IAI; NEA/ENA; NEA/NGA; SA/PAB

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL ETRD KPAL VM IZ IS PK SY TU AF LY
SUBJECT: VIETNAM AND THE MIDDLE EAST, AND BEYOND:
-- TRANSFORMING TRADITIONAL FRIENDSHIPS

REF: A. HANOI 2139 B. HANOI 2658

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. DESPITE A DESIRE TO PRESERVE "TRADITIONAL FRIENDSHIPS" IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THE LARGER THRUST OF THE GVN'S REGIONAL AND GLOBAL FOREIGN POLICY OVER THE PAST DECADE HAS BEEN TO BROADEN ITS BASE OF DIPLOMATIC PARTNERS AND TO PUT A GREATER EMPHASIS ON BUSINESS TIES. FOR EXAMPLE, VIETNAM SUPPORTS PALESTINIAN ASPIRATIONS FOR STATEHOOD, BUT ALSO MAINTAINS "NORMAL RELATIONS" WITH ISRAEL, ALBEIT WITHOUT AN EMBASSY THERE. THE GVN HAS NO DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH THE TALIBAN AND WORRIES ABOUT CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN THE CURRENT US-LED MILITARY OPERATIONS. ITS MAJOR COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIP IN THE REGION REMAINS WITH IRAQ. RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN ARE GROWING INCREMENTALLY. END SUMMARY.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL: WE CAN DEAL WITH BOTH

12. (SBU) DOAN NGOC BOI, DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE MFA'S WEST ASIA AND AFRICA DEPARTMENT, DESCRIBED THE PALESTINE AUTHORITY AS AN IMPORTANT "TRADITIONAL FRIEND" OF VIETNAM, WHICH STRONGLY SUPPORTS PALESTINIAN STATEHOOD. IN HIS VIEW, AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE "WOULD SOLVE MANY
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PROBLEMS" IN THE AREA. BOI NOTED THAT PRESIDENT ARAFAT VISITS VIETNAM REGULARLY (REF A) AND WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO DO SO FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

13. (SBU) BOI SAID THAT, IN LINE WITH VIETNAM'S EFFORTS "TO BE FRIENDS WITH ALL NATIONS," IT HAD EXPANDED ITS TIES WITH ISRAEL TO A MORE "NORMAL RELATIONSHIP," ADDING THAT "THERE IS NO REASON" THAT ECONOMIC TIES COULD NOT INCREASE. THE MFA'S TU NOTED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS OFFICIAL VISITS (BUT NOT VERY HIGH LEVEL) SINCE ISRAEL OPENED ITS EMBASSY IN HANOI IN 1993, INCLUDING THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE ISRAELI MFA ASIA AND PACIFIC IN JANUARY 2001, AND A DELEGATION FROM THE ISRAEL MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION IN APRIL 2001. THE GVN DEPUTY MINISTER OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND ENVIRONMENT VISITED ISRAEL IN 2000. TU CLAIMED THAT VIETNAM'S "NORMAL" RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL "HAS NOT AFFECTED" ITS FRIENDSHIPS WITH ARAB STATES, BECAUSE "THEY UNDERSTAND WE SEEK GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES." TU ADDED THAT DESPITE GVN WISHES TO OPEN AN EMBASSY IN ISRAEL SINCE 1993, THERE ARE STILL NO CONCRETE PLANS TO DO SO. VIETNAM'S AMBASSADOR TO

CAIRO IS ACCREDITED TO ISRAEL.

14. (SBU) ACCORDING TO ISRAELI EMBASSY SECOND SECRETARY EYAL BUVILSKI, ISRAEL IS CURRENTLY FOCUSED ON EXPANDING BILATERAL TRADE WITH VIETNAM, NOW ONLY ABOUT USD 25 MILLION ANNUALLY. HE SAID THAT WHILE THERE HAS BEEN A GENERAL INCREASE IN INTEREST FROM ISRAELI BUSINESSMEN, LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS, SUCH AS WORKING WITH LOCAL BANKS AND OBTAINING VISAS, REMAIN OBSTACLES. ISRAEL HAS EXPRESSED A HOPE THAT THE GVN SOON ESTABLISH SOME SORT OF OFFICIAL REPRESENTATION IN ISRAEL, SUCH AS A TRADE REPRESENTATIVE, TO FACILITATE SUCH TIES.
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BUVILSKI NOTED THAT ISRAEL IS ALSO INTERESTED IN EXPANDING ITS ONGOING AGRICULTURAL ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM AND IN PROVIDING TRAINING FOR ADDITIONAL VIETNAMESE STUDENTS IN ISRAEL.

AFGHANISTAN: WORRIES ABOUT CIVILIANS

15. (SBU) NGUYEN HUY DZUNG, SENIOR EXPERT IN THE MFA'S ASIA II DEPARTMENT, CHARACTERIZED VIETNAM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH AFGHANISTAN AS "NONEXISTENT," BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY. VIETNAM MAINTAINED AN EMBASSY IN KABUL FROM 1982-1992 BUT THEN CLOSED IT DUE TO THE CIVIL WAR AND VIETNAM'S OWN DIFFICULT FINANCIAL SITUATION. DZUNG REAFFIRMED VIETNAM'S OPPOSITION TO "TERRORISM OF ANY KIND" BUT EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE ONGOING US-LED MILITARY ATTACKS IN AFGHANISTAN DUE TO THE LIKELY IMPACT ON CIVILIAN POPULATIONS, A LINE REPEATED IN OFFICIAL MEDIA REPEATEDLY IN RECENT DAYS.

16. (SBU) THE MFA'S BOI SEPARATELY NOTED THAT THE GVN IS KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON FIVE AFGHAN NATIONALS APPARENTLY TEACHING AT AN ARABIC-LANGUAGE SCHOOL LOCATED ON THE LIBYAN EMBASSY COMPOUND. (NOTE: REF B REPORTED ONLY FOUR AFGHANS AT THIS SCHOOL WHO WORSHIP AT HANOI'S SOLE MOSQUE.) HE CLAIMED THAT THREE SHOULD BE LEAVING THE COUNTRY "SOON," SINCE THEIR VISAS HAVE EXPIRED.

PAKISTAN: LITTLE STEPS

17. (SBU) DR. FAZAL-UR-RAHMAN KAZI, THE PAKISTAN EMBASSY'S FIRST SECRETARY, TOLD POLOFF ON OCTOBER 16 THAT PAKISTAN IS ANXIOUS TO IMPROVE ITS POLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH VIETNAM AS PART OF ITS OWN EFFORT "TO BECOME MORE ENGAGED IN SOUTHEAST ASIA." PAKISTAN ESTABLISHED RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM IN 1973, BUT CLOSED ITS EMBASSY IN 1985, DUE TO "FINANCIAL REASONS." DR. FAZI DESCRIBED THIS MOVE AS A "MISTAKE" THAT WAS NOT RECTIFIED UNTIL OCTOBER 2000. HOWEVER, VIETNAM STILL DOES NOT HAVE AN EMBASSY IN ISLAMABAD, ALTHOUGH IT HAS AGREED "IN PRINCIPLE" TO OPEN ONE, ACCORDING TO DR. KAZI.

18. (SBU) PAKISTANI LEADER GENERAL MUSHARRAF VISITED VIETNAM FOR THREE DAYS IN MAY 2001, DURING WHICH THE TWO COUNTRIES SIGNED A TRADE AGREEMENT, A DRAFT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AGREEMENT, AND AN AGREEMENT TO FORM A JOINT MINISTERIAL COMMISSION. THE GVN DURING THE VISIT ALSO PLEDGED SUPPORT FOR PAKISTAN'S GOAL OF BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM AND THE ASIA-EUROPE FORUM. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN CONG TAN HAS NOW POSTPONED HIS VISIT TO PAKISTAN SCHEDULED FOR NOVEMBER, CITING THE ONGOING MILITARY
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ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION, DR. KAZI ADDED.

19. (SBU) DR. KAZI ADMITTED THAT THE BILATERAL ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP IS "LIMITED," WITH BILATERAL TRADE ONLY WORTH ABOUT USD 25 MILLION IN 2000. PAKISTAN IMPORTED APPROXIMATELY USD 16 MILLION WORTH OF GOODS FROM VIETNAM, PRIMARILY TEA, BLACK PEPPER AND FOOTWEAR, WHILE VIETNAM IMPORTED ABOUT USD 9 MILLION WORTH OF FERTILIZER, YARN, COTTON, AND OTHER GOODS. BOTH COUNTRIES HAVE PLEDGED TO INCREASE THE TRADE VOLUME TO USD 100 MILLION, BUT DR. KAZI SAID THAT THERE ARE NO FIRM TARGETS ON WHEN TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL. DR. KAZI ADDED THAT ONE SIGNIFICANT LOGISTICAL PROBLEM FOR PAKISTANI BUSINESSMEN IS THEY CANNOT OBTAIN VIETNAMESE VISAS IN PAKISTAN.

110. (SBU) THE MFA'S DZUNG SEPARATELY CONFIRMED THAT VIETNAM WOULD LIKE TO INCREASE BILATERAL TRADE WITH PAKISTAN, CLAIMING THAT THIS IS NOW VIETNAM'S "PRIMARY INTEREST" IN THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. ACCORDINGLY, VIETNAM IS "EXPLORING VARIOUS OPPORTUNITIES," HE ADDED WITHOUT OFFERING ANY SPECIFICS. DZUNG NOTED THAT THE IMPROVING POLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL TIES WITH PAKISTAN ARE IN LINE WITH THE 9TH PARTY CONGRESS' POLICY STATEMENT TO INCREASE VIETNAM'S PRESENCE IN "ALL SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES." HE ALSO NOTED THAT VIETNAM WOULD LIKE TO OPEN AN EMBASSY IN PAKISTAN, BUT ADMITTED HE

NOT KNOW WHEN IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO DO SO. HE AND DR. KAZI MADE PARALLEL STATEMENTS ABOUT HOW THE BILATERAL ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP COULD IMPROVE QUICKLY ONCE THE SITUATION IN THE REGION "STABILIZES."

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"TRADITIONAL FRIENDS"

11. (SBU) THE MFA'S BOI, DESCRIBED IRAQ (ALONG WITH LIBYA) AS VIETNAM'S MOST IMPORTANT "TRADITIONAL FRIENDS" IN THE MIDDLE EAST DURING A MEETING WITH POLOFF ON OCTOBER 12. HE NOTED IN PARTICULAR THAT IRAQ HAD PROVIDED SIGNIFICANT ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM DURING THE WAR WITH THE US. SEPARATELY, COLONEL TRAN NHUNG, DIRECTOR OF THE PEOPLES' ARMY NEWSPAPER INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT, CLAIMED THAT VIETNAM COULD NEVER FORGET IRAQ'S "INVALUABLE SUPPORT" DURING THAT PERIOD, WHILE ADMITTING THAT VIETNAM STILL "OWES" IRAQ APPROXIMATELY USD 100 MILLION. BOI NOTED THAT VIETNAM HAD, HOWEVER, NOT SUPPORTED THE IRAQ'S INVASION OF KUWAIT. COLONEL NHUNG STATED THAT VIETNAM HAD NONETHELESS "PROTESTED" UN SANCTIONS BECAUSE THEY "ESSENTIALLY HURT CIVILIANS."

12. (SBU) BOI STRESSED THAT THE IRAQ-VIETNAM COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIP IS "COMPLETELY WITHIN THE UN FRAMEWORK." VIETNAMESE EXPORTS TO IRAQ IN 2000 WERE WORTH APPROXIMATELY USD319 MILLION, PRIMARILY RICE, RUBBER, TEXTILES, AND GARMENTS. VIETNAM IMPORTS MAINLY OIL FROM IRAQ, PARTLY FOR RE-SALE ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET. BUT BOI PREDICTED THAT VIETNAM'S TRADE WITH IRAQ WOULD DECLINE AS IRAQ INCREASINGLY LOOKS TOWARD MORE TRADE WITH SYRIA, TUNISIA, AND TURKEY.

13. (SBU) ACCORDING TO SENIOR EXPERT TRAN VIET TU OF THE MFA'S WEST ASIA DEPARTMENT, ABOUT 2,000 VIETNAMESE NATIONALS ARE CURRENTLY WORKING IN LIBYA, ANOTHER "TRADITIONAL FRIEND." "A FEW" OTHERS ARE WORKING IN LEBANON AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE), HE ADDED. IN LIBYA, MOST ARE IN THE CONSTRUCTION FIELD, WORKING FOR SOUTH KOREAN CONTRACTORS. TU STATED THAT THE WORKERS DO NOT APPEAR TO BE IN ANY DANGER, BUT IF THE SITUATION DETERIORATED, VIETNAM WOULD TAKE ACTION TO REPATRIATE THEM. HE NOTED THAT VIETNAM HAD SUCCESSFULLY REPATRIATED 16,000 WORKERS FROM IRAQ DURING THE GULF WAR; BRINGING BACK THOSE IN LIBYA, LEBANON, AND THE UAE "WOULD NOT PRESENT A PROBLEM" SHOULD IT BE NECESSARY TO DO SO.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: MUCH AS VIETNAM WOULD LIKE TO ENHANCE ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH NEWER PARTNERS AS WELL AS "TRADITIONAL" FRIENDS IN AND NEAR THE MIDDLE EAST, DISTANCE, BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES AND WEAK MARKETS WILL REMAIN UNAVOIDABLE CONSTRAINTS. VIETNAM'S OWN FINANCIAL LIMITATIONS HAMPER ITS ABILITY TO OPEN NEW DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS, A FURTHER DISINCENTIVE FOR THE KINDS OF IMPROVEMENTS IN BILATERAL AND REGIONAL RELATIONS IT SEEKS.
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